



Testimony
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Before the Public Safety Committee
March 6, 2012

RE: HB- 5381 AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINT CONSOLIDATION FEASIBILITY STUDY AN ACT MANDATING REGIONALIZED PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINTS.

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *opposes* HB-5381, which gives the Office of State-Wide Emergency Telecommunications (OSET) broad authority to mandate consolidation of municipal, regional, multi-town and state public safety answering points and the funding of such consolidation based on a report prepared by Kimball Associates which is flawed in some respects.

Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) are the facilities operated on a twenty-four hour basis to receive 9-1-1 calls and dispatch emergency response services or transferring or relaying 9-1-1 calls to other public safety agencies. The PSAP is the first point of reception of a 9-1-1 call.

Under current law, OSET provides towns with incentive grants as part of the state's efforts to regionalize dispatch services to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness. However, a proposal in 2010 would have mandated regionalization of PSAPS and withheld funds to towns that did not comply with the mandate. The recommendations of the Connecticut PSAP Consolidation Feasibility Study also reference this approach. We are therefore concerned that HB-5381 gives OSET free rein to adopt a "stick" approach and move away from an incentive-based approach, undermining a town's ability to provide critical emergency services to its residents and businesses.

Towns should be partners in a state-*facilitated* process – rather than state-*mandated* process - to encourage PSAPs to regionalize. However, HB-5381 authorizes OSET to implement policies without engaging towns in a dialogue to determine which public safety answering point system would work best for their communities. Some towns may want to participate in regional programs but should not be forced to regionalize if they believe that it will undermine public safety or increase costs for their community. Other towns are facing barriers to regionalization due to existing labor contracts or other factors.

We therefore urge lawmakers to work with COST and other municipal organizations to ensure that the bill does not move forward without incorporating language that ensures that the state will continue to pursue an incentive-based program to encourage and facilitate the consolidation of public safety answering points.